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ABSTRACT

A significant loss in attraction effect has never been obtained from subjects who are the direct recipients of another's evaluation. Rather, the effect has been obtained only from those subjects who assume the role of recipient of another's evaluation. In a discussion context, the present study compared direct recipients (DR) and role playing subjects (RP) in terms of their attraction toward a person who evaluated them in either a negative-negative (NN) or positive-negative (PN) sequence. Ten subjects participated in each condition of the 2 (DR or RP) x 2 (NN or PN) factorial design. A 2 x 2 analysis of variance on the attraction measure revealed a significant interaction between mode of receiving information (DR or RP) and sequence of information (NN or PN). Orthogonal comparisons revealed that DR subjects showed greater attraction toward PN confederate than the NN confederate, with the reverse being obtained for the RP subjects. The results showed that while RP subjects produced a loss of effect similar to that found by Clore, Wiggins, and Itkin (1975), DR subjects produced an information averaging effect similar to Tognoli and Keisner (1972). This difference was discussed in terms of "sender-oriented, receiver-oriented, and message-oriented explanations". (Author)

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The Elusive Loss in Attraction Effect

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According to Aronson & Linder (1965), "A gain in esteem is a more potent reward than invariant esteem, and similarly, a loss of esteem is a more potent 'punishment' than invariant negative esteem." To test this hypothesis, Aronson & Linder structured an experimental situation where subjects overheard what were apparently candid evaluations of themselves from another person. These evaluations were either consistently positive, negative shifting to positive (gain condition), consistently negative, or positive shifting to negative (loss condition). The results of their experiment supported the gain hypothesis but not the loss hypothesis.

Subsequent research on the gain-loss phenomena has used a diversity of paradigms and has produced an equally diverse array of empirical findings. Some studies have found neither effect (e.g., Sigall & Aronson, 1967), while an equal number of other studies have found only the gain effect. Of more particular concern to the present research, only two published studies (Griffitt, 1971; Clore, Wiggins, & Itkin, 1975) have reported a significant loss effect. In the Griffitt study, subjects were alternately presented with trait adjective information about two stimulus persons. The informational sequence constituted the gain-loss conditions through either constant or changing evaluative implications. In the Clore et al attributional investigation, the subjects observed a video-taped interaction between two other people, assumed the role of the person being evaluated, and rated the attractiveness of the person giving the evaluation.

In summary, only two investigations have reported a significant loss effect.

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While Griffitt's research is generally cited in the gain-loss literature, it is perhaps more appropriately characterized as a study of order effects in impression formation. While the Clore et al study more closely approximates the original Aronson & Linder investigation, there is an essential difference between the two. Aronson & Linder's subjects were the direct recipients of another person's evaluation, while Clore et al's subjects role played the part of direct recipients. The present research, therefore, investigated the obvious question: Is the loss effect limited to role playing subjects who attributionally judge the attractiveness of an interpersonal evaluation?

Method

Subjects

The subjects were forty Northern Illinois University introductory psychology students (20 females and 20 males) who received experimental course credit for their participation.

Design

The experiment had a 2 x 2 factorial design, with 10 subjects participating in each of the four conditions. The first factor was mode of information reception. In one condition direct recipient subjects (DR) received another person's evaluations in a face to face situation. The other person was an experimental confederate. In the other condition, subjects were role players (RP) who read detailed transcripts of the experimental proceedings. The second factor was the evaluative treatment. In one condition the evaluator presented invariantly negative evaluations of the subject (NN); in the other condition the evaluator shifted from positive to negative evaluations of the subject (PN or loss condition). Thus, the subjects were either DR or RP who received either invariantly negative

evaluations or positive to negative evaluations.

Procedure

Direct recipient (DR) subjects participated in the experiment with a same sex confederate (C) and experimenter (E). The experimenter told the subject and confederate that the experiment was designed as a controlled investigation of the processes involved in group discussions. S and C were told that group discussions typically go through three phases: (1) participants from initial impressions of one another based on global information; (2) participants briefly present their reasons for taking stands on certain issues, and this information is used by the participants to form subsequent impressions of one another; (3) participants get involved in an open and free discussion of certain issues. S and C were then told that the present experiment would study these three phases in order to make the processes involved in discussions more explicit.

In accord with the cover story, S and C first examined one another's attitudes profiles which had been completed earlier in the semester. S and C verbally gave initial impressions of one another, and these were recorded by the experimenter. C's responses at this stage constituted the first half of the evaluation sequence. S and C were then asked to present their reasons for endorsing positions on two issues selected the the experimenter. After these reasons were given, S and C gave their subsequent impressions of one another, which were again recorded by the experimenter. C's comments at this stage constituted the second half of the evaluative sequence. Prior to the anticipated discussion of the two issues, S and C were asked to record their impressions of one another on a written questionnaire. The questionnaire contained the dependent measure of attraction and several adjective rating scales used in the Clore et al (1975) study. The following item was used as the dependent measure of attraction: How much would

you like to work with the other subject in another experiment? Once S and C had completed the questionnaire, the experiment was terminated with an explanation and debriefing.

Controls

Several controls were introduced throughout the experiment. All subjects were selected because they held identically and extreme positions on the two issues; the Ss uniformly considered the issues to be important, and felt that they were well-prepared to defend their positions in a discussion. The confederate was always on the opposite side of the two issues. Also, the confederate's evaluations contained prescaled adjectives selected from the normative data provided by Anderson's (1968) list. Finally, the experimental proceedings were carefully directed by the experimenter to maintain constancy of interaction between Ss and C.

Results

A 2 x 2 analysis of variance on the dependent measure of attraction revealed a significant interaction between mode of information reception (DR or RP) and sequence of evaluation (NN or PN), $F(1,36) = 11.20$, $p < .005$. Orthogonal comparisons revealed that direct recipient subjects showed greater attraction toward the shifting positive-negative confederate (PN mean = 5.6) than the invariant negative-negative confederate (NN mean = 3.9), $F(1,18) = 6.66$, $p < .02$. By contrast, the role playing subjects displayed greater attraction toward the invariant negative-negative confederate (PN mean = 3.5), $F(1,18) = 4.58$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

Results of the present study show that the attraction responses of the

role playing subjects produced a significant loss effect, i.e., the RP Ss disliked the positive-negative confederate more than the negative-negative confederate. By contrast, the direct recipient subjects produced a significant reinforcement or information averaging effect, e.e., they disliked the negative-negative confederate more than the positive-negative confederate. These results together with existing findings in the literature (e.g., Aronson & Linder, 1965; Clore et al, 1975; Tognoli & Kiesner, 1972) suggest that the loss effect may be limited to role playing subjects.

The obvious question, of course, is why should role playing subjects produce the loss effect when direct recipients subjects do not? To answer this question, it may be illustrative to examine three types of explanations for the loss phenomenon. These explanations focus on (1) the manipulated feedback; (2) the person giving the feedback; and (3) the person receiving the feedback.

Manipulated feedback explanations include notions of expectancy (Berkowitz, 1960) and contrast (Sherif & Sherif, 1961). According to these explanations, subjects would perceive the evaluator to be more cold and less sociable at the end of a positive-negative sequence than after a negative-negative sequence. Since cold and unsociable people are less attractive than warm and sociable people, the loss effect would occur. Ratings on the trait adjective scales do not confirm this explanation. That is, while the adjective ratings for the confederate's warmth and sociability paralleled the confederate's attractiveness ratings for the direct recipient subjects (PN > NN), role playing subjects in the positive-negative and negative-negative conditions rated the confederate essentially the same (PN = NN). That is, while the RPers showed the loss effect in the attraction measure, the ratings for warmth and sociability do not support the manipulated feedback explanation.

Explanations focusing on the person giving the feedback involve the evaluator's attributes. For example, an evaluator giving both positive and negative feedback might be seen as more discerning, intelligent, sincere, or competent than an evaluator who gives uniform, unchanging feedback. In other words, when a discerning and intelligent person shifts from liking us to disliking us, we experience bitter rejection. When a less discerning and less intelligent person consistently dislikes us, we experience simple dislike. In our study, ratings on the trait adjective scales do not confirm this explanation. Once again, however, the direct recipient subjects' ratings of the confederate's discernment, intelligence, sincerity, and competence paralleled their ratings of the confederate's attractiveness (PN > NN). Again, the role playing subjects in the positive-negative and negative-negative conditions rated the confederate essentially the same (PN = NN), on these adjectives.

A third type of explanation for the loss effect concerns the person receiving the feedback. Explanations of this type focus on the affective involvement of the subjects. According to these explanations, one would expect the direct recipient subjects to show a loss effect because they are the ones who directly experience the evaluator's loss of liking or respect, i.e., the evaluator's shift from positive to negative. Role playing subjects would show a loss effect only to the extent that they identify with, and seriously assume the role of, direct recipient subjects. Our data do not straightforwardly support this explanation, i.e., DR Ss did not show the loss effect. If anything, our data suggest that the role playing subjects over-identified with the direct recipient subjects and attributed more affective involvement to the direct recipient subjects than they in fact experienced. In other words, the role playing subjects seemed to have a cognitive set something akin to the following, "If I were in

the direct recipient's place and an evaluator first thought I was sophisticated and daring and then later said I was indecisive and probably hadn't studied the issues, I would really dislike the evaluator."

Thus, if one assumes over identification and over attribution on the part of our role playing subjects, our data are consistent with explanations that focus on the person receiving the feedback.

Conclusions

In summary, two tentative conclusions are suggested by our data. First, if loss effects are to occur in studies examining the reactions of direct recipient subjects, future experimenters will have to ensure that the affective involvement of their subjects is greater than it has been in the past. Second, given that a significant loss effect has never been obtained with DR subjects it may be the case that the loss effect exists only in the minds of role playing subjects (and their experimenters) who attribute a process to direct recipient subjects that they simply do not have.

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